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TAGS: OPRC KMDR TU PREL KPAO
SUBJECT: TURKISH MEDIA REACTION
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2009

Media Highlights: PKK Returnees; PM Erdogan on Foreign Policy;
Wexler on Turkey-Israel Tensions; Turkey-Israel
Dispute Deepens; Davutoglu on Turkey-Azerbaijan; Iran Nukes

PKK's 'Peace Group' Returns to Turkey
Following the dramatic Oct. 19th border crossing of 34 PKK affiliated individuals, Minister of Interior Besir Atalay today gave details about the event and told the press that it was only the beginning of a process and that more - "around 100 to 150" - are expected to return Turkey in the near future. At a morning press conference, which followed a breakfast for all Ankara-based TV and print outlets, Atalay said the Turkish government "was ready and prepared to end terrorism" and that "we will hear more good news in the upcoming days." The Minister explained that the "homecoming" from the mountains by these terrorists is only a first phase of the democratic initiative, noting that those who return know that their way is "a dead-end street."

Milliyet also reports Undersecretary of Turkish intelligence agency (MIT) Emre Taner and Deputy Director of Security Mustafa Gulcu visited southeast of Turkey in order to evaluate possible events to take place after the arrival of the "peace group." Taner met with civic and intelligence authorities in the region, and briefed the Prime Minister on his return Monday afternoon.

All media outlets reported that a "Peace Group" of eight PKK militants from Kandil Mountains and 26 people from Makhmur refugee camp arrived Monday at Habur border crossing to turn themselves in. Papers report the "Peace Group" was welcomed by the Kurdish DTP officials and 50,000 other party supporters in Silopi. The PKK group was welcomed with placards saluting them as "peace envoys" and "peace doves." Twenty-nine of the 34 PKK members who returned were released. Leftist Taraf says the return of the PKK group to Turkey was a "historic turning point." The meeting in Habur has fueled hopes for peace, comments Taraf. Liberal Radikal daily newspaper views the return of the PKK group to Turkey as a "critical beginning." Mainstream Hurriyet says the "reaction" of Turkish officials to the return of the first PKK group would influence the decision of other militants planning to return. Conservative Bugun says the other militants in the mountains were "hopeful" that they will be able to go back home. Before crossing the border, one of

the members of the group told mainstream Milliyet they were not going to Turkey to "surrender," but to take a democratic step for lasting peace. Milliyet expects the government to take "radical steps" after the return of the first PKK group to Turkey. The paper says that families living in the Makhmur refugee camp, who have not been involved in crimes against Turkey, were expected to return. Around 12,000 Turkish Kurds live in the UN-controlled Makhmur Camp in northern Iraq.

Commentary: While papers across the board proclaim the historic event, commentary is mixed. In "Implementation Begins," mainstream Hurriyet's Oktay Eksi sounds a sour note by blaming the US for taking belated action against the PKK: "This is a result of an obvious collective effort by the US, Iraq and Turkey because it was the right time for the US to eliminate the PKK problem on the eve of their withdrawal from Iraq. Otherwise no one can buy the argument that the US woke up after 25 years and realized that the financing for PKK was coming from drug trafficking." Mainstream Vatan's Gungor Mengi talks about "making the most of this historic opportunity and the need to encourage more to return." Liberal Radikal's Murat Yetkin notes "the next step is very important because the way the returned militants are treated will shape the future: it will encourage more to come or just the opposite." Leftist Taraf's Yasemin Congar considers the event as an indication of "politics winning over weapons" and similarly mainstream Milliyet's Hasan Cemal warns: "all should pay utmost attention to this process not to ruin it and be encouraging." Islamist leaning Yeni Safak's Fehmi Koru notes the importance of "being smooth and speedy" regarding the treatment of the returnees.

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Erdogan at the Istanbul Forum: "No Shift in Turkey's Foreign Policy"

Mainstream Sabah and liberal Radikal headlines read "There is no Shift in Turkey's Foreign Policy" and report that PM Erdogan described Turkish Foreign policy as "zero problems with neighboring countries" and said that Turkey wants only peace, not terror in the region. Speaking at the ongoing Istanbul Forum, Erdogan said "we determine our foreign policy after evaluating every issue and every detail. We realize that it is not possible to have peace and prosperity in the region until after the problems end in Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Lebanon." Conservative-nationalist Turkiye quotes PM Erdogan saying "Terror has no religion, nation or homeland. Common struggle against terrorism is a must. We want to create a Middle East which is not a center of clashes but rather a center of peace and tranquility." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headline reads "Nuclear Message From Erdogan" and says Erdogan commented on Iran's nuclear program by saying that Iran should clear doubts in the international arena and made an implicit reference to Israel's nuclear weapons and said "not just Iran but all countries that possess nuclear capabilities in the region should be discussed." Sabah and Hurriyet's web page notes that Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel have dominated talks at the Istanbul Forum Conference. Participants tried to decide whether Turkey is losing its leverage over Israel by leveling open criticism against Israeli policies on Palestinians. The participants also discussed whether Turkey's increasing presence in the Middle East and its diplomatic efforts are overestimated, as well as whether the current government's focus on its eastern neighborhood implies a shift away from Europe.

US Congressman Wexler on Turkey-Israel Tension: For U.S. Congressmen Robert Wexler, the current situation is the best of times but also the worst of times. For Wexler, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is to be applauded as "one of the brightest minds in the Middle East" due to his desire to have "zero problems" with his neighbors. "Turkey's close relations with Syria do not frighten me," he said. Yet he said there was one exception to the zero problems with neighbors and that is Israel; his main message suggested that Turkey should not improve its relations with the Arab world at the expense of Israel. Wexler also accused Europe of letting Turkey look east. "How many speeches does the Turkish public have to endure from the French and the Germans that no matter what Turkey will do it will never become a member of the EU. It is not so bewildering an outcome if the Turkish public takes a different course. Stop thinking in

five years terms, examine your own behavior, Europe," he said.

Turkish-Israeli Dispute Deepens

Media outlets focus on the rising tensions between Turkey and Israel following Turkey's removal of Israel from planned military exercises in Turkish air space. In "Israel's Reception Boycott," liberal Radikal says, "Israel will show its reaction to Turkey by boycotting the National Day reception." In its front page headline, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes, "Tensions with Israel Don't Calm Down." Mainstream Milliyet says, "Israel's Protest of Turkey," and notes, "Israeli ministers boycotted the invitation to the National Day reception in the Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv on October 29." Mainstream Hurriyet says, "National Day Reception Splits the Israeli Cabinet." Moreover, mainstream Sabah and Hurriyet's web page notes that Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel have dominated talks at the Istanbul Forum Conference. Participants tried to decide whether Turkey is losing its leverage over Israel by leveling open criticism against Israeli policies on Palestinians. The participants also discussed whether Turkey's increasing presence in the Middle East and its diplomatic efforts are overestimated, as well as whether the current government's focus on its eastern neighborhood implies a shift away from Europe. For U.S. Congressmen Robert Wexler, the current situation is the best of times but also the worst of times. For Wexler, Turkish PM Tayyip Erdogan is to be applauded as one of the brightest minds in the Middle East due to his desire to have "zero problems" with his neighbors.

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Davutoglu sends a message to Azerbaijan

All papers focus on the warm message Foreign Minister Davutoglu gave to Azerbaijan during a joint press conference with Czech counterpart Jan Kohout. Sabah headline reads "Ending the occupation in Karabakh is one of Turkey's basic issues", Cumhuriyet, Milliyet and Hurriyet headlines read "Turkish Policies on Karabakh will not change even if the skies crumble." Davutoglu responded a question regarding the removal of Turkish flags from a monument in Baku saying "Turkish and Azerbaijani flags are equally sacred for Turkey. Turkey attaches great importance to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Occupied territories in Karabakh is one of the top priorities of Turkey and Turkey's position on this issue would never change."

Iran: Nuclear Marathon Starts in Tension and Calls for

Extraditions: (Radikal) Media note the first day of talks in Vienna with Iranian officials aimed at reaching an agreement "to get Iran to send most of its enriched uranium abroad" ended inconclusively. In "Uranium Talks Getting Hotter," leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says, "Iran says it will produce its own enriched uranium in case the talks don't meet Iranian demands." In a related story, in "This Time Iran-Pakistan Tension," liberal Radikal says, "Iran accuses the US, Britain and neighboring Pakistan of backing Jundollah militants who blew up six Revolutionary Guards commanders." The paper adds, "Iran closed its border asking the Jundollah leader to be extradited." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes, "Tehran Accuses Pakistan," and says, "Iran claims US and Britain provide equipment to the attackers and accuses Pakistan of training Jundollah militants."

Upcoming events:

Q October 21: Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev visits Turkey.

Q October 22-23: Turkish Investment Summit in London.

Q October 24: President Gul visits Serbia.

Q October 24-25: Central and Eastern Europe Energy Forum in Istanbul.

JEFFREY